

FAQs for HHMI Lab Head Salaries

What is HHMI's approach to Investigator, Senior Group Leader, Group Leader and Freeman Hrabowski Scholar salaries?

In the past, HHMI determined Investigator salaries by taking into account information from host institutions or previous employment. To bring more consistency to HHMI's salary structure, in 2018 HHMI developed a salary scale for its lab heads, including Investigators and Janelia Research Campus Senior Group Leaders and Group Leaders. As of September 2018, the start of HHMI's fiscal year, HHMI began using this scale to determine salaries for new and existing Investigators and Janelia Senior Group Leaders and Group Leaders. Starting in September 2023, HHMI began using this scale to determine salaries for Freeman Hrabowski Scholars. A benefit of HHMI's new approach is transparency for lab heads, who can better predict what their salaries will be over time. Investigators, Freeman Hrabowski Scholars, and Janelia Group Leaders and Senior Group Leaders are referred to in these FAQs as "HHMI Lab Heads".

How was HHMI's new lab head salary scale developed?

HHMI used reputable, third-party market compensation surveys to establish competitive salary rates. Pay rates vary by geographic region, years of experience, degree (PhD or MD), and certain limited types of scientific recognition (specifically, membership in the National Academy of Sciences or the Royal Society, or receipt of a Nobel Prize or Lasker Award). HHMI will continue to review market data regularly.

Will HHMI share the scale with host institutions, on request?

No. HHMI has considered making the scale public at some point but at this time has decided against doing so.

How are an HHMI Lab Head's years of independent lab head experience determined?

In general, independent lab head experience begins with the first assistant professor position. Trainee positions are not included, nor is time spent in certain other positions, such as instructor.

What happens to an HHMI Lab Head's salary if they transfer from one HHMI site to another?

If an HHMI Lab Head moves to a site that is in a higher-paid geographic region, their salary will be adjusted to be consistent with the scale in the new geographic region on the effective date of the transfer. If an HHMI Lab Head moves to a site that is in a lower-paid geographic region, their salary will be frozen until it aligns with the scale in the new geographic region, taking into account the other factors reflected in the scale.

Will HHMI negotiate salary to retain or hire an HHMI Lab Head?

No. We believe the salary scale is competitive and generous, and we will not negotiate to pay above scale.

Does HHMI expect host institutions to pay at the same scale?

No. HHMI understands that host institutions will make their own decisions about compensation levels for their faculty who are not HHMI Lab Heads, including faculty whose HHMI appointments have ended.

What happens to an Investigator's, Group Leader's, or Senior Group Leader's salary if they are unsuccessful at their HHMI scientific review?

If an Investigator, Group Leader, or Senior Group Leader is not renewed by HHMI, their salary will be held at its current rate throughout the remainder of their HHMI employment, during their phase-out period. They will no longer be eligible for future salary increases. For Investigators, in the case of an approved, expanded, five-year phase-out in lieu of scientific review, the Investigator will continue to be eligible for annual increases consistent with the scale.

If I have other questions about this, whom should I ask?

HHMI Vice President and Chief Scientific Officer Leslie Vosshall can address host institution questions about the HHMI Lab Head salary scale for host based HHMI Lab Heads. HHMI Vice President and Executive Director Janelia Research Campus Ron Vale can address questions about the HHMI Lab Head salary scale for Janelia.

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